



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

December 9, 2004

ICE PROBE LEADS TO INDICTMENT OF 4 IN DEADLY SMUGGLING-RELATED ROLLOVER

TUCSON – Four persons have been indicted by a federal grand jury here in connection with a deadly smuggling-related rollover accident near Sierra Vista earlier this year that cost five people their lives.

A 16-count indictment was returned Wednesday against two Mexican nationals and two citizens of Honduras following a joint investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) into the smuggling scheme that ended tragically with a spectacular multi-car collision October 16.

Indictments were returned against Jose Luis Zepeda-Cruz, 24, of Mexico; Carlos Cortez, 29, of Mexico; Wilbert Garcia, 20, of Honduras; and Jimir Valle Martinez, 21, also of Honduras. All of the men are charged with transporting illegal aliens for profit. In addition, Cortez and Martinez were indicted for transporting illegal aliens resulting in death, a charge that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison or death.

“This case again shows the complete disregard human smugglers have for the welfare of the migrants they’re purporting to help,” said Kent Johansson, deputy special agent-in-charge of investigations for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Tucson. “ICE will continue to work with its state and federal law enforcement partners to see that the criminals behind this reprehensible enterprise are punished to the fullest extent of the law.”

The tragic incident occurred October 16, 2004, when Cochise County Sheriff’s deputies and Arizona DPS officers attempted to stop a stolen pick-up truck near Sierra Vista. The driver sped away and lost control of the vehicle at the intersection of State Route 90 and Buffalo Soldier Trail Road. Eleven of the vehicle’s 17 occupants were ejected. A total of five people died in the accident — three undocumented aliens and two U.S. citizens who were in another car at the intersection.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.